

# LÉVY GORVY

PRESS RELEASE

**THE THIRD CHAPTER OF BEYOND THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE, A GLOBAL FOUR-CITY EXHIBITION AT LÉVY GORVY WITH ACCLAIMED AMERICAN ARTIST MICKALENE THOMAS, TO LAUNCH IN PARIS TOGETHER WITH A SOLO EXHIBITION AT GALERIE NATHALIE OBADIA**

**Paris**—On October 7, Lévy Gorvy presents Mickalene Thomas' *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in Paris, the third chapter of a multipart exhibition that will unfold across four international cities during fall 2021 to present interconnected bodies of new work, ranging from painting and collage to installation and video. In conjunction with the exhibition at Lévy Gorvy Paris, Thomas will present a series of large-scale collages at **Galerie Nathalie Obadia's** new location at 91, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré in the 8th arrondissement. Over the past 20 years, Thomas has cultivated a distinctive vocabulary of Black erotica, Black sexuality, and Black queer aesthetics and thought through her expansive multidisciplinary practice. With the sequential premieres of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in Lévy Gorvy's locations in New York, London, Paris, and Hong Kong, and accompanying exhibition at Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, Thomas sets out to formally, spatially, and philosophically draw attention to the central study of her work: the power and desirability of Black women, and their presence, imprint, and legacy in global avant-garde visual culture.



*The Charnel House (Resist #5)*, 2021. Rhinestones, acrylic, and oil on canvas mounted on wood panel, 78 x 134 inches (198.1 x 340.4 cm). © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Shown at Lévy Gorvy Paris.

Thomas' exhibition at **Lévy Gorvy** will feature five large-scale paintings from her *Resist* series as well as a new film, *Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced (Resist)* (2021), that explore the central role of Black women within civil rights activism from the 1960s through the present day. While a uniquely American movement, the struggle for civil rights has inspired uprisings for human rights around the world for generations. Most recently, **Black Lives Matter**, originated by Alicia

Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in 2013, has sparked activism against racial oppression in many countries and has connected decades of state violence against Black citizens with systemic inequity and culturally enforced prejudices that inform Black people's experience across the globe.

Thomas commemorates this lineage by combining historical and contemporary photojournalistic images of protests, to position her multigenerational subjects amongst a long succession of powerful female activists that includes Harriet Tubman, Fannie Lou Hamer, Stacey Abrams, and the many women who have made innumerable contributions to the cause and often go unnamed. Composed of images that are silk screened onto the canvas in layers and reworked in oil and acrylic paint, Thomas' *Resist* works offer a response to global unrest, cultural diplomacy, and injustice being enacted upon Brown and Black bodies. In *Guernica (Resist #3)* (2021), Thomas presents a dense black and white composition populated by iconic images of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protestors and the Civil Rights-era protests, marches, and sit-ins. Thomas underscores the pain and sense of loss with the ghostly reference to Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), the artist's response to the aerial bombing of the Basque town

during the Spanish Civil War. Here Thomas depicts Picasso's impaled horse and the women's agonizing response to witnessing the violence, drawn in shadowy overlay across her silkscreened compositions. Though spanning decades, Thomas' compositional juxtaposition of *Guernica*, the Civil Rights Movement, and Black Lives Matter mirror each other, acknowledging that the fight for civil rights continues to be an ongoing struggle in the endless pursuit for justice.

In *Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced (Resist)*, a five minute eleven second, multi-channel video installation, Thomas translates the unique aesthetic qualities of collage to her approach to filmmaking by presenting a compilation of documentary footage extrapolated from archival and news sources featuring key moments from the Black liberation movement and composition by American jazz drummer, composer, producer, and educator Terri Lyn Carrington. The screens, hanging in a collaged configuration in the middle of the space, and offering multiple vantage points, play the same narrative but at varying intervals, creating a beautiful cacophony that is at times out of sync. Like a jazz composition, *Resist* offers a visual and auditory manifestation of divergent threads that are made harmonious by the deft calibration of its layered parts—an allegory itself for political struggle and liberation.

The intermingling of references throughout the *Resist* series compresses history into a poetic critique of the static nature of race in America, where enduring inequality and racism, and the country's refusal to account for it, remains a pivotal political force. Images of legendary African American cultural critic and writer James Baldwin, whose quote inspired the film's title, can be found throughout the series as if to reiterate that too little has changed and acknowledging that his words and teachings continue to resonate as fervently today as they did during his own time.

At **Galerie Nathalie Obadia**, Thomas will feature a series of large-scale mixed media collages from the artist's *Jet Blue* series, composed of various materials, fabric, paper, rhinestones, photo silkscreen, acrylic and oil paint. Also referencing Picasso, in this case his *Seated Women* series, Thomas incorporates images of the *Jet Magazine* calendar pin-up models from the 1960s and 70s, and engages the formal qualities of some key predecessors such as Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, and Faith Ringgold, as well as Henri Matisse, a demonstration of the diversity of cultural traditions that conceived modern art and thought. Through this confluence of Black pop culture and art historical references, Thomas expertly manipulates the formal qualities of the avant-garde—which at the time emphasized freedom, fluidity, experimentation, and non-hierarchy—within the political paradigm of Black liberation, embodied in “Black is Beautiful” aesthetics promoted by *Jet Magazine*, itself the vanguard of American thought and culture.



*Jet Blue #43*, 2021. Color photograph, mixed media paper, acrylic paint, rhinestones, fiberglass mesh on museum paper mounted on dibond, 61 x 48.25 inches (154.94 x 122.555 cm), Framed 66.625 x 53.875 inches (169.2275 x 136.8425 cm). © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Shown at Galerie Nathalie Obadia.

For Thomas—whose work has long depicted the beauty, desire, and power of Black women in order to subvert the material and cultural oppression and marginalization to which they have been subjected—engaging in a cultural touchstone like *Jet* underscores her determined commitment to visibility and historical and contemporary celebrations of Blackness, femininity,

transgression, and queerness. Through her presentations at both Levy Gorvy and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Thomas presents a fuller picture of both the internalized and externalized struggle for civil rights: the private agony and suffering made public alongside unbridled expressions of freedom, joy, and beauty—two sides of the endless pursuit for justice. Thomas' works in Paris overall call attention to the Black women at the frontline of a battle they fight whether they choose to or not, and through whose labor and sacrifice, millions of people around the world have achieved something closer to the ideals of liberty and democracy.

### **About Beyond the Pleasure Principle**

*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is an international exhibition unfolding across Lévy Gorvy's spaces in four global capitals—New York, London, Paris, and Hong Kong—as well as Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, over the course of fall 2021, unveiling interconnected bodies of new work by acclaimed American artist Mickalene Thomas. This multisite presentation will feature paintings, installations, and video works that expand Thomas' decades-long exploration of the Black female body as a realm of power, eroticism, agency, and inspiration, as well as a vehicle for reformulating visual idioms of modernism inherited from some of the 20th century's most influential masters. Presented in uniquely designed environments for each of the five locations, Thomas' exhibition will also include a video made in collaboration with her life partner and muse Racquel Chevremont, an art advisor, curator, and collector.



Mickalene Thomas in the studio, New York 2021. Portrait by Tatijana Shoan © Mickalene Thomas / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

### **About the artist**

Mickalene Thomas (b. 1971 Camden, NJ; lives and works in Brooklyn, NY) is a visual artist, filmmaker, and curator known for her paintings, collages, photographs, videos, performances, and large-scale installations that draw from and critique art history and popular culture in order to present nuanced representations of femininity, sexuality, desire, and power. Blurring the distinctions between abstraction and figuration, object and subject, real and imaginary, Thomas constructs portraits, landscapes, and interiors that subvert notions of beauty and examine how identity, gender, and subjectivity have been informed by the fetishization of the female body throughout history. The artist's enduring use of collage as a medium, method of abstraction, and conceptual form, has permeated every facet of her practice. By repurposing and recontextualizing found images from the artist's personal archive, in addition to mass produced imagery from visual culture, Thomas creates formally complex compositions, imbued with narrative depth, that engage alternative, active modes of looking, and propose a new visual language.

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